**6. THE T'ANG DYNASTY (618-907)**.

The T'ang emperors set up a political system in which the emperor was supreme and government officials were selected on the bases of merit and education. The early T'ang rulers applied the equal allocation system rigorously to bring about a greater equity in taxation and to insure the flow of taxes to the government. A census was taken every three years to enforce the system, which also involved drafting people to do labor. These measures led to an agricultural surplus and the development of units of uniform value for the principal commodities, two of the most important prerequisites for the growth of commerce and cities.

The T'ang capital of Chang'an was one of the greatest commercial and cosmopolitan cities in the world at that time. Like most capitals of China, Chang'an was composed of three parts: the palace, the imperial city, and the outer city, separated from each other by mighty walls.

The T'ang was a period of great imperial expansion, which reached its greatest height in the first half of the 8th century. At that time, Chinese control was recognized by people from Tibet and Central Asia in the west to Mongolia, Manchuria (now the Northeast region of China), and Korea in the north and Vietnam in the south.

**The An Lu-shan rebellion**.

Most of the T'ang accomplishments were attained during the first century of the dynasty's rule, through the early part of Emperor Hsuan TSong's long reign from 712 to 756. However, late in his reign he neglected government affairs to indulge in his love of art and study. This led to the rise of viceroys, commanders responsible for military and civil affairs in the regions. An Lu-shan was a powerful viceroy commanding the northwest border area. He had both connections at the imperial court and hidden imperial ambitions. In 755 he rose in rebellion.

The emperor fled the capital with an ill-equipped army. These troops soon rebelled and forced the emperor to abdicate in favor of his son.

The new emperor raised a new army to fight the rebels. An Lu-shan was assassinated in 757, but the war dragged on until 763. Afterward, the Chinese Empire virtually disintegrated once again. The provinces remained under the control of various regional commanders. The dynasty continued to linger on for another century, but the T'ang empire never fully recovered the central authority, prosperity, and peace of its first century.

The most serious problem of the last century of T'ang was the rise of great landlords who were exempt from taxation. Unable to pay the exorbitant taxes collected twice a year after the An Lu-shan rebellion, peasants would place themselves under the protection of a landlord or become bandits. Peasant uprisings, beginning with the revolt under the leadership of Huang Ch'ao in the 870s, left much of central China in ruins.

In 881 Huang Ch'ao's rebels, now numbering over 600,000 people, destroyed the capital, forcing the imperial court to move east to Luoyang. Another rebel leader founded a new dynasty, called Later Liang, at Kaifeng in Henan Province in 907, but he was unable to unify all China under his rule. This second period of disunity lasted only half a century. Once again, however, China was divided between north and south, with five dynasties in the north and ten kingdoms in the south.

**T'ang culture**. Buddhist influence in art, especially in sculpture, was strong during the T'ang period. Fine examples of Buddhist sculpture are preserved in rock temples, such as those at Yongang and Longmen in northwest China. The invention of printing and improvements in papermaking led to the printing of a whole set of Buddhist sutras (discourses of the Buddha) by 868. By the beginning of the 11th century all of the Confucian classics and the Taoist canon had been printed. In secular literature, the T'ang is especially well known for poetry. The great T'ang poets such as Li Po and Tu Fu were nearly all disillusioned officials.

The T'ang period marked the beginnings of China's early technological advancement over other civilizations in the fields of shipbuilding and firearms development. Both reached new heights in the succeeding dynasty of Song.

**Papermaking; Firearms** By the 13th century papermaking spread throughout Europe. Paper was a Chinese invention. It had been adopted by the Persians and then by the Arabs, who brought the art to Europe. (See Paper)

Powder (not gunpowder, because guns were not yet known) and fireworks rockets were introduced into Europe in the 1200s. They had been invented in China some years earlier.

The earliest mention of firearms is in a Dutch chronicle dated 1313. It states that firearms were invented in Germany. The first picture of a primitive cannon can be found in an English manuscript dated 1326. (See Rocket; Explosive; Firearms)

|  |
| --- |
| **Tang Dynasty (618-906 AD)**  **Emperor Taizong, Li ShiminEmperor Taizong, Li Shimin**  Chinese historians regard the Tang dynasty as both a revival of the best of the Han dynasty and the high point of power and culture in Chinese history. An open, cosmopolitan era, the Tang was a time when cultural influences and ideas streamed into China on the Silk Road, and China became a model for emerging kingdoms in Korea and Japan. Its capital, Chang’an at times had a million inhabitants and drew peoples of many faiths and ethnicities from all over the accessible world. Art and literature flourished in the Tang period, and it was the peak moment of Chinese lyric poetry.  Li Yuan, a military leader of possible Toba background founded the Tang. Allied for a period with threatening Turkish nomads, he and his son Li Shimin, toppled the weak Sui government and ruthlessly took control. In the process, Li Shimin killed his elder brothers who were conspiring against him), as well as many other rivals. Once assuming control Li Shimin, also known as Tai Zong, went on to become one of the most effective emperors in Chinese history, leading a strong, stable, and influential state.  Tang pottery in Shanghai museum: Westner on camel  **Tang pottery in Shanghai museum: Westerner on camel**  The walled capital of Chang’an (modern Xi’an) was a bustling city filled with foreign merchants who arrived on the Silk Road, though the sometimes capital of Luoyang was still an important city. Chang’an was divided into over 100 districts, including those for pleasure and living quarters of the foreign merchants—which included Turks, Sogdians, Indians, Jews, Manicheans, Zoroastrians, and Nestorian Christians. Music and dancing from Central Asia were popular in the pleasure quarters—often performed by exotic foreign women. Such areas were frequented by scholars and officials and are described in the poetry and literature of the era. Markets were filled with exotic fruits including grapes, melons, and lichee nuts (brought by “pony express” from southern China). Silks, damasks, satins, jade, agate, coral, pearls, rubies, rare woods, furs, and precious metals were all traded in and out of the city. Southern ports in far-away Guangdong welcomed traders from countries all around the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, including Arab and Persian traders from the Middle East.  The civil and military bureaucracies were revived and expanded under the Tang. Below the emperor were civil officials and military leaders, largely drawn from powerful gentry (large, hereditary landowners) families. Middle-level positions were filled by men from provincial gentry families and those who did well in the civil service examinations that were reinstituted in the Tang. The greater populace was comprised of farmers, artisans, craftsmen, and traders. Large armies were deployed on the northern borders and local armies and militias were filled with peasant farmers.  **Three white pagodas in today's Dali, once the Nanzhao Kingdom's capitalThree white pagodas in today's Dali, once the Nanzhao Kingdom's capital**  Military campaigns were carried out against Turks in the northwest and eventually against Korean states in the east, Tang forming a special relationship with the kingdom of Shilla. Chinese influence on Japan (in the Nara and Hei’an periods) was also great at this time. On other fronts, in the seventh century the Tibetan state became very powerful to the west, and a large kingdom called Nanzhao arose in what is now southwest China and parts of Southeast Asia.  Land was an issue from the very beginning in the Tang. One of the first acts of the new rulers were attempts at land reform. In an attempt to weaken the holdings of powerful gentry landholders, land was re-divided, giving farmers equal shares of land – a system that had been tried in earlier times, including Wang Meng’s experiments in the Han and for a while in the Toba kingdom. This “equal field” system offered both advantages (land to till) and disadvantages (taxes and corvee labor) to the peasants. Over time, many moved to the less-restricted south, eroding the tax base. Another old system called “baojia” (collective households) was tried. In this system, the farmfolk were divided into five family groups responsible for submitting their taxes and annual labor quotas (for state projects). Even this proved ineffective, and the attempts at land reform gradually diminished as the gentry regained power over more lands.  Wu Zetian  **Empress Wu Zetian**  A number of colorful rulers and other palace figures populate Tang history. Among these is Empress Wu Zetian, arguably the most powerful woman in Chinese history. She came to the imperial court as a concubine of Li Shimin, but later had a relationship with his son, Emperor Kao Zong. She eventually became his empress (forcing him to divorce his wife), and succeeded in placing her son on the throne. She later deposed him and placed herself in power as emperor of her own Zhou Dynasty, which lasted form 690-701. According to Wolfram Eberhard, this was in part possible because women in the Tang had more freedom of movement than in earlier and later times due to lingering attitudes from the nomad kingdoms in the period of disunity. Once in control, Wu Zetian, in an attempt to consolidate her power, moved the capital east to Luoyang, away from the powerful gentry families of Chang’an. She instituted reforms in the examination system and government– making it more difficult to succeed solely on family connections and women were allowed to take civil service examinations to become officers in the court. She also promoted the interests of her allies, the Buddhists. Many monasteries became very rich. Huge temples and a massive iron pagoda were built with government support. A good administrator, the country was strong under her rule, though in constant threat from the Turks. Nevertheless, historians have been unkind to Empress Wu, traditionally describing her as evil and debauched. In recent years, her accomplishments have begun to be better appreciated.  Painting by Wang Xuyang: peasant rebellion lead by Huang Chao at the end of the Tang Dynasty  **Painting by Wang Xuyang: peasant rebellion lead by Huang Chao at the end of the Tang Dynasty**  Empress Wu was eventually forced from power and the Tang was restored. Soon after, the Emperor Xuanzong came to power. He was a capable ruler who fortified China’s northern borders by the establishment of nine military command zones staffed by his appointees. He also made reforms in government administration, finances, and attempted to deal with problems of grain transport and taxation of the peasants. In his later years, however he became infatuated with a young concubine Yang Guifei. Their love affair is one of the most popular tragic love stories in China. During this period, one of the border commanders, a man of mixed-nomad stock named An Lushan, ingratiated himself with [**Yang Guifei**](javascript:void(0)) and later fomented a rebellion that ended in 763 and marks the decline of Tang power. Although Tang was still in many ways a well-run state, after the An Lushan rebellion, a crisis in leadership ensued. The borders weakened, as did the imperial treasury, and rebellions ensued. Eventually smaller military states began to appear in north China. Eventually Tang fell apart, ending a great period of openness, creativity, and power. |